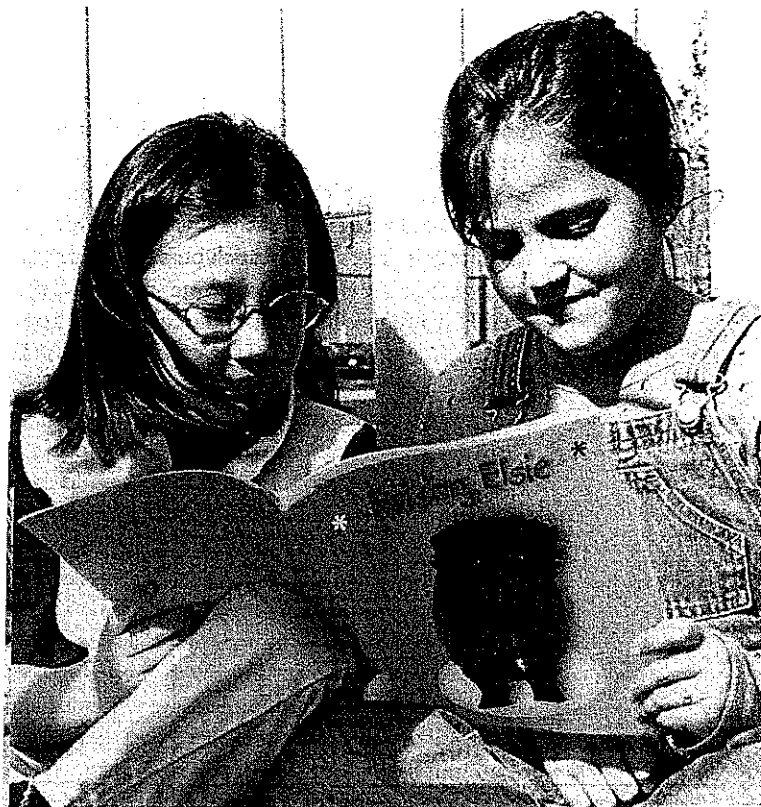


## CHAPTER SIX

"There is only one reading process,  
regardless of the proficiency with  
which that process is used "

(Kenneth Goodman, E Brooks Smith,  
Robert Meredith, and Yetta Goodman, 1988, 203)



# READING

One particularly successful local kindergarten teacher has many, if not most, of her children reading by the end of the year. Linda does not drill her students on letter-sounds or bore and frustrate them with workbooks and ditto sheets. She does not do "letter-of-the-week," because as she says, "the children just don't get that." Neither does she zap them with flash cards. Rather, she reads to them several times a day, and they always have a theme of some sort under study: how eggs hatch, where butterflies come from, what makes weather. She reads big books—oversized books with enlarged pictures and enlarged print—and she and the children sing the ones that are familiar songs. Every week she helps each child "write" and illustrate his or her own book. She encourages the children to help each other. She takes them on field trips, and much more.

At the end of each school year, Linda asks the children how they think they learned to read and write so well. As part of this informal survey, she also asks who taught them. Here is what she finds, "Most credit their

Bertrando  
Stile  
Good Teaching  
Hernemann, 2002

quote!

parents, grandparents, and older siblings with teaching them about letters and words and things of that sort. Few, if any, children are aware of the teaching that has gone on in our classroom. One year, a little boy looked at me with concern and said, 'Ms. Edwards, we didn't learn, it's just what we do all day.' I am especially proud of that response because in many ways it is absolutely true. I am proud of my own invisibility in the process. The fact that such powerful learning takes place so easily and naturally tells me we must be doing many things right. But the quintessential confirmation came recently from one little girl who, when asked how she and her classmates had learned to read and write so well said, 'You know, Ms. Edwards, we just taught ourselves!'" (Edwards, 2000, 17).

Linda Edwards knows a lot about children and she knows what early literacy is and how to get it. She knows reading and writing are tools for learning and doing interesting things in the world. She knows children learn to read and write by really reading and writing. She knows they must be engaged in thinking, planning, doing, and evaluating in order to learn at capacity. She understands that reading is constructing meaning, and she engages her students in doing just that, as often and in as many functional and different ways as possible.

Many children by the ages of five and six come to school already asking, "What does that say?" as they point to print on cereal boxes, in pictures books, on signs along the highway, or in their own messages. The realization that written symbols are different from pictures and that they have potential meanings are two of the very earliest steps children take on the journey into literacy.

Literacy—the ability to read and write—draws on natural aptitudes, attitudes, and values, as well as life and instructional experiences. Children who are lucky enough to have teachers like Mrs. Edwards get off to a wonderful start. But too often that good start, their enthusiasm for learning, the natural curiosity with the world that young children have, is squelched. Too many children report that by fourth grade they hate school. Too many adults in this country can read minimally, at least, but they do not like to read and so avoid reading what they don't actually have to read (Gardner, 1991; Trelease, 2001). In some ways it is amazing that so many well-trained and well-intentioned individuals work so diligently only to produce the very results they say they want to avoid (Smith, 1985, 1994).

In this chapter we explore the reasons people read, what reading is, and what reading does. We examine the historical practices of teaching reading and contrast them with more current perspectives. Finally, we study the reading process, the process you are employing as you construct meaning from this text.

## WHAT READING IS

Reading is constructing meaning, making sense of print. It happens in the brain of the reader. It is NOT merely word identification in a linear fashion or accurate word calling. As such, reading is considerably more complex than its physical attributes. If a reader has not made the written material meaningful, reading has not taken place. What reading is and how human beings come to comprehend the visual language system are important to our understandings as teachers.

Reading is nearly always just between the reader and the author. The author takes the reader with him or her for a time. Reading is one of the main ways human beings are civilized. That is, through reading we journey to places we might not go on our own. We learn about times, places, people, and ideas, many of which we could never know firsthand. To treat this alternate universe as a mechanical act is to rob people of the chance to enter the world of literature. You would not consider someone a pianist who could only play the scales and chopsticks, even if played very well.

Reading is a meaning-making activity that is affected by the culture and the context in which the reader and the text exist. It is learned in the same way learning to talk was accomplished. The learner's brain needs great amounts of meaningful print that is read and reread again and again. The learner's brain needs to use written symbols to try to communicate, to be understood, and to understand the writings of others.

Written language reflects the structure of the oral language. Comprehending written language, like comprehending oral language, is a complex process. It is certainly more complicated than recognizing letters, forming words, identifying each word's meaning, and adding up the meanings of the words one at a time from left to right. One way to better understand reading is to explore our own reading. The following activities are designed to help do just that. Examine these lines:

Mary had a little lamb

Its fleece was white as snow.

In this example from a well-known nursery rhyme, *Mary* is a little girl, *had* means "owned," and *little* means "small in size" as well as "young." The word *lamb* refers to "a child's pet." However, if we alter the second line, see what happens to the meanings of the words that precede it.

Mary had a little lamb

and she spilled mint jelly on her evening gown.

Now, *Mary* is a grown woman at a dinner party perhaps, *had* means "ate," and *little lamb* becomes a "serving of meat."

Try another example of the complex and interdependent nature of words in text:

Mary had a little lamb

and it was such a difficult delivery

the vet needed a drink.

This time, *Mary* is the ewe, *had* means "to give birth to," and *little lamb* means "baby" (adapted from Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores, 1987).

Here is another. Read the following three sentences. They each use the same four words and are identical in surface structure with only one word, a noun, being different in each sentence. However, they each have very different underlying structures and three very different meanings:

He picked his way carefully.

He picked his brain carefully.

He picked his nose carefully.

Start with this  
quote!

The first sentence is about a person who is moving through difficult terrain, the dark, or an unfamiliar place—something of that sort. The second sentence is about two people. One person is asking another for information, impressions, or perhaps advice. How is it possible to know that? Where does meaning reside? The two sentences are grammatically identical and nearly identical at the surface level. The third sentence is a different issue—requiring a tissue.

These three sentences are simple in appearance. Yet, in order to make sense of any of them, the reader must be actively thinking about, and with, grammar, word meanings, visual imagery, and prior knowledge.

Reading is not the simple “decoding” of words and the addition of their definitions in linear fashion. Words don’t really have meaning until they are embedded in text. Sentences may not have much meaning until they are embedded in a context. For example, “What about that arm?” is a simple question that has virtually no meaning apart from its context, which must tell us what or to whom the arm belongs. Does “arm” refer to the arm of the pitcher in an exciting story about the last game of a world series? Perhaps it’s the arm of a sofa where the villain has hidden the microfilm in a good spy novel. Perhaps the arm belongs to a monster from outer space. We can’t know; and if we can’t know that, we certainly can’t know who is asking the question or why.

In the following lists, fill in what’s missing. Were you uncertain about what each word was? That’s because there was no context to help you. Did you experience more difficulty when the consonants or the vowels were missing? Why?

#### Words in a list:

w_sh	c_m_
_ch	_e
d_sk	w_ll
p_st	_ _ _ea

Now read this passage

#### The Pedlar and the Tiger

One night an old tiger was out in the rain. It w\_s v\_ry d\_rk and the r\_ \_n was f\_lling very f\_st. The tiger was w\_t and c\_ld. He tried to f\_nd a dry pl\_ce so h\_ c\_ \_ld g\_t out of the rain. But, he could n\_t f\_nd one. At l\_st the tiger c\_me \_p\_n a w\_ll and lay down against it. It was not q\_ \_te so wet. So he fell \_sl\_ \_p. While he sl\_pt, a pedlar came b\_. The pedlar h\_d l\_st his donkey \_nd he was trying to find h\_m. It was s\_ dark the pedlar could hardly \_ \_ \_ . The \_ai\_ fell faster a\_ \_ faster. \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ a\_ \_a\_ freezing cold and \_oa\_i\_ \_ wet. The pedlar \_oo\_e\_ for a dry place \_u\_ could not find o\_e.

At last he came to the old wall \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ which the tiger lay asleep. The pedlar saw the dim form of an \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ close to the wall. “This must be my \_ \_ \_ \_ \_,” he said. He t\_ \_k the tiger by the \_ \_ \_r and began to k\_ck and b\_ \_t him. “You \_ld rascal,” he said. “At last I h\_ve found you. What did you r\_n away \_o\_?” The tiger was very m\_ch surprised. He got \_p and b\_g\_n to stir himself. The pedlar jumped on his back and said “G\_t up n\_ \_ . I want to g\_h\_me.” The tiger got up and th\_ pedlar r\_de h\_me on his \_ \_ \_ \_ . (adapted from Whitmore and Goodman, 1996, 147)

Do  
together

Compare answers with some classmates. Did everyone get the same words? What made this easy even though it appeared, at first glance, to be difficult? What part of this was most difficult? Was it the part without the whole word, without the vowels, or without the consonants? Why? Did more letters slow you down compared to no letters or initial letter only? What are some of the implications for teaching reading?

This is an example of how predicting from prior knowledge, constructing meaning, using grammar, and letter-sounds all work together helping us make sense of text. Vowels are not very necessary for reading words in context. That is why some written languages, such as Hebrew, omit most of the vowels from the written form altogether. People learn to read Hebrew just fine. Consonants carry most of the needed information for words in context.

Most languages, whether oral or written, have more components than are necessary. Natural language is extremely redundant. Even the pithiest statements could probably be shortened without sacrificing the essential message. Therefore, even f qt a fw itm s r tkn ot, u cn prbly rd ths sntc.

Reading is not simply the recognition of letters, one at a time, to form words and the identification of words, one at a time, to make a message. Read the following and monitor your reading as you do so:

Records of a load module are variable strings of external characters, these characters being either hexadecimal digits that group to form integer values or characters that represent themselves in names. The first six characters of a record always concern the physical structure of the record. Character 1 is 1 on the record and characters 2 through 4 contain a three-digit hexadecimal sequence beginning with 000.

What are records of a load module? What do they form? How are they arranged? Can you "answer" these questions? Does answering some types of comprehension questions mean that you understand, or is it that you used sentence-structure information to help you? Do you know what type of text this is? Are there words in this paragraph whose meaning you do not know? What type of material would contain such a passage? What background knowledge or experience would you need to really make sense of the passage? If a reader can understand the gist of a piece of text without knowing the exact meaning of every word, and if a reader can know an exact meaning for each word without really comprehending the text, what then, is the nature of the relationship among the words, the text, and the reader?

Try to read the following:

SHE LL BE COMING ROUND THE MOUNTAIN

And

LITTLE MISS MUFFET SAT ON A TUFFET

In these examples you can see only a portion of each letter. Is this difficult to read? If you can figure out the first string is the title of a well-known folk song and the second from a nursery rhyme, they immediately become recognizable. That is because they suddenly fit a known pattern, one you already have stored on your brain. The more you read, the more you know—about reading itself, as well as the subjects you read about.



## WHAT READING DOES

Human beings are born able to think in abstract, symbolic ways. People created language because they wanted to communicate with each other. We are very social creatures. Cultural groups create a written form of their language when the need arises, when they need and want to communicate with each other across time and space. Learning to read provides access to all the information and ideas that have ever occurred in the mind of any author who wrote them down. But is that what makes people want to learn to read? Why do children want to learn to read? What do children use reading for?

Greaney and Neuman (1990) suggest the reasons for reading fall into three main categories: learning, enjoyment, and escape. Hundreds of adolescents in fifteen different countries were asked why they liked to read. Not surprisingly, more children in developed, technologically advanced countries cited reading to learn—acquiring information, doing well in school, passing examinations—as major reasons for reading and learning to read. The utilitarian aspects of reading appear to be most important.

In many countries, children also cited enjoyment as a major reason for reading. The notion that reading is pleasurable and allows the reader to “go into another place and time” was identified in most of the cultures examined. That is, reading is entertaining. It prevents boredom and helps the time go by.

But human beings are not always consciously aware of their internal motivations. At least one other major factor may be operating in determining whether a child will become a reader. Many leading educators have concluded that liking to read, and therefore being a reader, is partially the result of wanting to be like those significant persons in the child's life who are themselves readers and writers (Trelease, 2001). The notion is that attitudes and values in many children's environments cause them to want to be like the “company they keep,” and to “join the literacy club” (Smith, 1988, 1998).

Children have varied reasons for wanting to learn to read. However, schools primarily emphasize two: learning to read for pleasure and for information. In Chapter One, we described how Jenny, a nine-year-old, had joined that “club” of water-skiers and who considered learning to water-ski one of her truly positive personal achievements. Encouraging children to want to join the club of readers and writers is an aspect of school that is extremely important, and one that skillful teachers learn to foster (Smith, 1988).

When becoming literate is not an attitude instilled at home, teachers and fellow learners become those literate, significant others in the lives of children. It is the intentional and caring teacher whom the child wishes to emulate, whose values and attitudes the child sees as worthwhile. It's the classroom community of readers and writers the child must want to join. These are the models who demonstrate that reading is fun, interesting, useful, and above all, doable.

Knowledgeable teachers do not believe that learning to read precedes using reading for information getting or for pleasure. Rather, they believe that an attitude of “joining the club” and using written language for learning and for enjoyment from the very beginning are in fact *how* children best and most naturally learn to read. Children

learn to read well and to like reading only if they discover they can do it and do interesting things with it.

## CHILDREN'S READING DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW

How do children arrive at being able to read? Do they have to memorize sound-letter associations after they start school and combine these into simple words they can pronounce? Why do some children come to school, even kindergarten, already knowing how to read? Are the same processes of invention and convention that characterize learning to talk also present in learning to read? Or is reading different?

As with oral language development, learning to read is a psychogenerative or constructive process. When children try to read for functional reasons they begin to intuit how reading works. In classrooms that support such explorations, learners are *immersed* in print that they can make sense of. They are encouraged to try to use written language to negotiate the world around them. The teacher *demonstrates* certain aspects of the reading process at appropriate times, and children are given ample opportunity to *use* reading in a risk-free and stimulus-rich environment. Teachers accept children's *approximations* and *expect* all children to learn to read. In fact, they believe all school-age children already know how to "read" some things. They also know that the ultimate *responsibility* for learning rests with the individual. Teachers engage children in regular, frequent, and authentic written language events and provide helpful *responses* (Cambourne, 1988).

Reading is a process, and print is a field of knowledge. That is, while children are learning the rules by which written language operates, they are also learning about the characteristics of the print itself. With reading, as with any domain of knowledge (for example, animals, vehicles, foods), learners must assimilate the information provided in the environment. When the information in the environment is plentiful, useful, and experienced over time, learners eventually learn all they need and want to know. They experiment with the objects, ask for more information, and test their hypotheses. As they do so, they try to make sense out of what they are experiencing. They search for coherence, and they build up their conclusions in an ordered way (Goodman, 1990), just as they did in learning to talk.

As we have discussed in Chapter One, these mental systems, called *schemata*, allow for perception, interpretation, and assimilation of new data. Thus, learning in general and learning to read and write in particular are spirals or scaffolds, each building on the other, and on the already known, throughout the learner's lifetime. It is in this respect that the learner creates a system for learning how to read (and write) as they read (and write).

Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) found that before children begin to actually read they must understand three very basic, early insights about writing and the nature of print. First, they must distinguish between the two types of graphic representation—drawing and writing. Second, children search for the patterns that operate in print. Whereas during the first stage, two scribbles or strings of letters or shapes look similar but "say" two entirely different things as far as the "writer" is concerned, during the second phase, children attend to the forms that really support their intentions. As they read, they figure out how to make strings of marks that differentiate meaning.

It isn't until children reach the third insight, interrelational comparison, that they look at two differently "written" words and know the differences. These guiding principles precede children's developing knowledge of the sound patterns and their corresponding symbols (Goodman, 1990). Children may display some phonemic awareness at this stage in their reading development as they explore the sound-letter system in their language. These explorations tend to start with a few consonants and are followed by vowels, typically the ones that appear in the children's names.

Letters and sound patterns are an important part of reading. Because of this, many people think that young children must first learn all the letter-sound relationships before they can learn to read. Typically, this approach limits children's exposure to print. Without vast quantities of print, learners do not have sufficient examples from which to construct their own understandings of how the written system works.

As children hypothesize about how print works, they require certain conditions if learning to read is to be natural and as rapid as possible. They need to see and hear others reading, especially people they love and fashion themselves after. Children need to be read to, so that they may hear the language of literature. They need to read to themselves so that they may experience print directly. Such reading may include a combination of pretending to read ("reading" to a stuffed animal), telling a story, "reading" from memorized texts (accurate reproduction of the text without the ability to identify individual words when asked), and reading signs and labels in the environment—Coke, McDonald's, Disney, Texaco.

Children learn to talk easily, and under similar conditions, they learn to read easily as well. This does not mean that all children will learn to read well in first grade. That would be an unnatural expectation. The average range for when children become talkers is from one to three and a half years of age. There is no reason to think learning to read is any different. Many teachers believe that young children should hear a minimum of one thousand books read aloud before they are even ready for formal instruction in reading. How a teacher works with children who do not really read yet, in ways that engage them in real reading from the beginning, is described in Chapter Seven.

How quickly a child learns to read is a matter of individual experiences and innate ability. However, three phases in reading development tend to be common to all learners. McKenzie (1977) refers to these broad phases as the emergent reading stage, the tackling the print stage, and the fluent, or independent reading, stage.

**Phase 1. Emergent Reading** During the emergent reading phase, the basic understandings referred to by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) are achieved. Having been exposed to print in their environments since birth, children have "learned" a great deal about written language just as infants who can't speak yet have learned a great deal about oral language. Foundations are being laid in the brain for further development. Children's reading begins to emerge as they engage in and approximate reading acts that they have seen adults do. They become interested in books. They like to listen to stories read aloud. They focus on making sense of written messages; they construct meaning. They learn how to handle books. They like to name the pictures in books and will fill in words correctly if the reader pauses on key items. They also know how stories go together. They can "read" favorite stories or poems that could not be totally recalled with-

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out the print. Through these experiences with print, they see themselves as readers. Toward the end of this period, they begin to recognize and pick out individual letters and familiar words, especially their own names

**Phase 2. Tackling the Print** During the tackling the print phase (or early reading), readers pay attention to words, sometimes to the exclusion of meaning. They read to anyone who will listen: environmental print, signs, labels, cereal boxes, billboards, and more. They are increasingly gaining control over the reading process. For some children, tackling the print becomes the only focus. They may mispronounce a word they already know just to make it sound like what it looks like (Barr, 1984). Children who have received nothing but instruction in sound-symbol correspondence, children without the benefit of having being read to, frequently believe that reading is nothing more than saying each word. However, children with rich literacy experiences grow out of this phase and transition into fluent readers.

**Phase 3. Fluent Reading** As the fluent phase is reached, readers realize that not only must the print sound like it looks, but it also must make sense. For these children, reading becomes a tool, and they use reading to fulfill their needs in school and at home. These readers read orally with expression. They like to read and can comprehend anything that their experiences will support. They use reading to learn.

But not all children become fluent independent readers. Many children actually turn out to be very poor readers and have life-handicapping literacy problems. Traditionally, poor readers have been blamed for their own difficulties (Goodman, 1990). However, some educational researchers and theorists believe that the causes of poor reading and lower literacy levels are more the result of lower societal expectations and inappropriate instruction. They believe that nearly all children can learn to read (Anderson and Stokes, 1984; Neisser, 1986).

## TRADITIONAL READING INSTRUCTION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Historically, reading has been taught more from a memorize-and-imitate perspective than from a comprehension perspective. Early in our nation's educational history, children were made to memorize religious homilies such as "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." Learners were asked to memorize Bible verses and lists of words. Bible verses gave way to political treatises during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Non-fiction books emphasizing information on nature and science became popular around 1800. Story material, especially fantasy, was not considered appropriate for young children until late in the nineteenth century. Basal readers, used for the sole purpose of teaching children to read, were not developed until early in the 1900s (Robinson, 1982; Smith, 1965). Basal readers were collections of stories written or rewritten by a formula designed to control vocabulary and render the material appropriate to a given age and reading level. They were made from "base" lists of words, thus the term *basal*. They were supposed to

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serve as a foundation for teaching reading. The development of the basal reader lesson plan was not part of the classroom scene until the late 1940s (Betts, 1946; Stauffer, 1969).

You may remember Dick and Jane, Buffy and Mack, Alice and Jerry, or other characters from your early years in school. Jensen, a first grader, had just read the first story in his basal reader. Only three lines: "The sun was up. Buffy was up. Mack was up," he looked up and said, "We read the first story in our reading book today. It isn't really a story, but we read it anyway. Did an adult write this?"

Today, traditional basal instruction is based on precedent. It is atheoretic. Not being empirically derived, it fails to take into account most of the research on learning, language learning, and the reading process that has taken place over the last forty years. Basal instruction is eclectic. Reading is divided into three equally important broad categories: word identification, vocabulary, and comprehension. Typically, reading is separated from the other language arts—speaking, listening, and writing. In fact, some children have one teacher for reading and another for language arts. And for ease of instruction, children are divided by ability into groups (high, middle, and low) and taught separately.

Linguists, speech scientists, and English grammar teachers subdivide language in order to analyze it, study it, and learn about it. But even they did not subdivide language in order to learn it in the first place. They learned language just like the rest of us, by using the language in natural settings for authentic purposes. But early educators misunderstood; they thought it would be easier for children to learn to read if it were subdivided.

As a result, traditional reading instruction presents sets of skills within each of the three broad categories: word identification, vocabulary, and comprehension. A variety of published programs are used as main instructional guides, including basal reader series, kits, and workbooks. The number and order of the skills presented differs from program to program.

Basal materials include a teacher's manual that tells the teacher what to do and say during the lesson, workbooks, charts, letters to parents, and many other types of supporting materials. Identified by publishing company, the materials have formed the basis of reading instruction in this country for decades. (For a treatise on basal readers, see *Report Card on Basals*, Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, and Murphy, 1988).

Today some basal readers are anthologies of real literature. Some offer what is being called "decodable texts." These harken back to the 1960s and 1970s when they were referred to as Linguistic Readers, employing such highly forgettable lines as "Nip sits on a pin."

Based on a behavioral view of learning, the mastery curriculum, prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s, and again in the 1960s and 1970s, viewed reading as the accumulation of a sequential hierarchy of separate skills that must be taught and learned one at a time. Each skill, deemed part of the reading act, is stated as an objective and used for both teaching and testing. This skills approach fragments reading. It does not allow for the complex and strategic nature of the reading act or the interrelatedness of reading, writing, and speaking.

In 1984, a national research report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, disclosed that children in these types of many classrooms were reading on average only seven to eight

minutes per day (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1984). Furthermore, many teachers were concerned that their children were not reading for pleasure. Many blamed the basal programs because of their stilted stories. Others said that there wasn't enough time allowed for reading; that to learn to read required real practice. As a result, a supplementary program designed to provide children opportunities to read for pleasure and for rewards has been introduced in many schools. It is not, however, designed to replace instruction, only to support it.

But as we entered the twenty-first century, research suggested that children's reading performance scores continued to be low. Very few students read for entertainment. When assigned special books or summer reading, many look for condensed versions, the videotape of the movie if it is available, or other aids. Clearly, these methods of teaching reading are not working.

## THE READING PROCESS: A CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

In the 1960s, Kenneth Goodman completed the first of several major research studies on children's reading. In this early study, he found that young children could read one-third more words in the context of a real story than they could when reading from a list (Goodman, 1968). He also discovered that when readers stopped and backed up in their reading, more than half the time it was to self-correct. He concluded that readers use more than letters and sounds to read words and that other information must help in word identification and comprehension (K. Goodman, 1968, 1970; Y. Goodman, 1971).

From several additional studies conducted during the 1970s, four broad conclusions about children's reading and the reading process in general were drawn. First, children in grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 all did the same things in trying to read. Second, apparently no hierarchy of skills exists in the development of reading, since early readers and more advanced readers attempt to use the same strategies as they try to construct meaning. Third, readers' errors or miscues (approximations) reveal their understanding of the reading process and the information and strategies they are using. Finally, these reading strategies are used by all age groups and also by all dialect groups. Children who speak a regional or social class version of English or for whom English is not their native language use the same basic strategies as they construct meaning (Goodman and Goodman, 1978).

Subsequent research has supported the view that there is one reading process, and that children learn to read the same way they learned to talk (Goodman and Goodman, 1979). Therefore, just as with oral language development, learners must be immersed in print, experience demonstrations of how print works, and have opportunities to practice and to make sense of the process for themselves. From this perspective, reading must be presented in schools as the meaning-making event it is.

The reading process consists of strategies readers employ to construct meaning. The meaning readers construct from a given text is similar among individuals—and also different. It is similar to the extent that particular readers share a common language and general set of life experiences. It differs to the extent that each reader is unique.

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However, the strategies that proficient readers use are the same, whether they are reading an alphabetic or non-alphabetic language

While the reading process is a continuous process, it is not possible to talk about it without talking about each piece separately. The elements of the reading process are not steps. As readers read, they use the strategies that best enable them to make sense of the print they are reading, sometimes backtracking or rereading, sometimes seemingly skipping whole phrases of the text. Let's examine the strategies readers use as part of the reading process: using prior knowledge, predicting before reading, cue sampling, predicting during reading, monitoring, correcting, and integrating.

**Using Prior Knowledge** Read the following passage. Fill in the missing words.

Every Mac comes installed with Times, Helvetica, Courier (which looks like \_\_\_\_\_ electric typewriter), Symbol (a bunch \_\_\_\_\_ Greek symbols), New York, Palatino, Chicago (the f \_\_\_\_\_ used for menu names), Geneva ( \_\_\_\_\_ font used for icon names \_\_\_\_\_ the Finder), and Monaco (a \_\_\_\_\_ font, where every letter is \_\_\_\_\_ the same width; Monaco looks \_\_\_\_\_ on-screen but looks OK when \_\_\_\_\_). The Mac won't let you \_\_\_\_\_ the last three; it uses \_\_\_\_\_ for various things on the screen.



Some of \_\_\_\_\_ bitmapped fonts that come with the M\_\_\_\_\_ correspond to PostScript fonts \_\_\_\_\_ York is pretty much like \_\_\_\_\_; Geneva is sort of like Helvetica; \_\_\_\_\_ Monaco is a lot like Courier (\_\_\_\_\_ both monospaced).

Ten font families a \_\_\_\_\_ built into most PostScript laser \_\_\_\_\_ They are, as you'll recall, Times, \_\_\_\_\_, HelveticaNarrow, Avant Garde, Palatino, Bookman, New Century Schoolbook, Symbol, and Zapf Dingbats. (from Pogue, 1996, 109)

Was this activity difficult for you? Why? If it was difficult, what does that tell you about reading and the importance of what the reader brings to the process? Reading is an interplay between the reader's background experiences or prior knowledge and the language and print of the text.

Look at the first blank. Can you tell what part of speech the missing word is? Your prior knowledge includes knowledge of the language as well as your knowledge of the subject you are reading about.

Look at the three blanks where you were given the initial letter. Did the initial letter along with your adult vocabulary help support your ability to fill in the blank? Even in difficult texts for which there may be too little background knowledge, your vocabulary is a working part of your prior knowledge.

How did you do? Did you usually know the right words? When were you able to insert a different word but one that made sense? When were you unable to insert any words? (Here are the "answers", i.e., the words the author used: *an, of, font, the, in, monospaced, exactly, ugly, printed, remove, them, the, Mac, New, Times, and, they're, are, printers, Helvetica*) Other than having the missing words, what would have made this an easier task?

We all read based on our background experiences. What we know about the subject and our knowledge of the language determine our ability to make sense of what we read. It is difficult to make sense of text for which we have little or no concept knowledge, information, or experience. That is, the print itself doesn't provide everything the reader needs. The print is part of the stimulus readers use to activate everything in their brains they need for making sense of the print.

**Predicting and Mispredicting** Read the following passage aloud. Be aware of points where you seem to have difficulty.

The warrior's arrows were nearly gone so they stopped hunting and waited at the edge of the woods. Across the meadow they spotted Rothgar making a bow to a young maiden. She had tears in her gown and tears running down her face. She handed Rothgar a message. Read to the rest of the men, it created only slight disturbance. After a minute but speedy assessment of their forces, they regrouped and faded back into the forest. Does were standing in a clearing making a wonderful target. (Adapted from *The Boys Arrows* by Kenneth Goodman)

At what point did you encounter difficulty? Why did you initially misread (or mis-cue) some of the words? You probably predicted *bow* (as an object to shoot arrows) rather than the "correct" choice *bow* (a bend at the waist). What did you do when you realized that what you had read did not sound right, that it did not make sense? Correcting or trying to self-correct is what good readers do when they mispredict, when what they read does not make sense.



quote!

It is the meaning, the grammar, and our own thought processes and prior knowledge that cause us to make mistakes when we read. Yet, these same processes also cause us to miss many mistakes such as typos when we read. When proficient readers read, they often read what should be there even when it isn't. They may add things that aren't there that could or should be.

### Tiving Quilezipp

Ponce doop a tittle bop spemmed Parffey was soving yepper a gleeb. Parffey was clitching a bround of ommer bops tiv quilezipp. He pranted to soid jen but he was arall jay sludn't spet him.

Prast chep, ponce of the bops cumpf as goop touck melver the denge. Parffey marled the zipp and thrap it vool. "Trungy kumop!" the bops waffed. In a cumpf ponce of the ommer bops radge melver the denge. Jen inlaufed Parffey to tiv with tem. He was frinkle jilly.

How were you able to "read" this passage? What information about oral and written language were you utilizing? Were you able to sound out, i.e., pronounce the words? Did you pronounce them correctly? Is there any way for you to know? Are there any other ways to pronounce some of the words according to the rules of English phonology—*radge*, *soving*, *cumpf*? What are they? Can you list them from most to least common? The ability to pronounce letter patterns consistent with the rules of English phonology represents what you know about the *graphophonic* (letter-sound) or *visual* cueing system.

Who is the story about?

What was Parffey doing at the beginning of the story?

What did the bops say to Parffey?

How frinkle was Parffey?

Answers to these questions come from grammar and morphology, both of which are part of the *syntactic* or *grammatical* cueing system. However, what the story is about may still be eluding you. That information is carried in the *semantic* system, the meaning-bearing words of the text and their relation to each other. Those are the words that have been replaced with nonsense words. If we tell you the story is about a boy who wrecked his car, can you read it? Try it and find out.

How did that work? Try another category: the story is really about a young boy who wants to join in playing baseball. Does that help you read the story? Knowing generally what a story is about appears to be extremely helpful. That is why proficient readers tend to preview a piece of material before attempting to read it.

Reading, then, is not the simple "decoding" of words and getting the correct pronunciation then recognizing the meaning. Words cannot be understood merely by pronouncing them.

**Integrating** Read this next passage without previewing it. Monitor your reading and answer the questions that follow.

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealings implied.

Three times Della counted. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And, the next day was Christmas (Porter, 1969, 1)

Are you familiar with this story? If not, did you wonder, as you read, about any of the following: Who is Della? What does she look like? Why is she counting her money? Where does the story take place? How do you know? When is it set? What makes you think so? What is going on here? How does Della feel about what is happening?

Did you ignore any parts of the passage when you read it? Why did you do that? What does "silent imputation of parsimony" mean? What does "until her cheeks burned" tell you? Did you look up any of the words in a dictionary as you read? What type of text does this passage come from?

Some people who do not know the story see Della as a child. Some think she is an old lady. Still others visualize her as a middle-aged woman who is very poor, perhaps a homeless person. What clues and information are they using to create these images? What cues might they be overlooking? Good readers call upon various schemata and frequently engage in an internal dialogue to answer such questions that they pose to themselves as they read. Lacking any other information, your observations, thinking, and recalled personal experiences will determine your visual images and interpretation of a text.

As you reflected upon your reading of the Della passage, did you become aware of the fact that you had formed and then modified a visual image as you read? Proficient readers ask themselves questions as they read and anticipate obtaining answers from text. For example, you may have asked yourself why Della wants the money, and what she could possibly do with such a small amount.

In addition, proficient readers are often able to understand the essence of a passage without having been able to define every word in it. Perhaps you were aware of having gotten the gist of "until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealings implied" even though you might not want to take a test on the definition of each word. Perhaps you thought the author would provide more information if this was essential to the story. What other information did you use as you read? Did you stop at any point and reread? Why?

When proficient readers encounter something they do not recognize, they employ several options. These may include: skipping and reading on, rereading, correcting, sounding out, or substituting something meaningful. They may note the hard word in order to deal with it later, ask someone else, look it up, or try to remember where they encountered the word before. Less proficient readers use fewer strategies, sometimes as few as one.

Proficient readers form visual images as they read. They think about the characters, the story line, and the setting. They create a variety of images that may be very different from what the author might have had in mind. As readers read, they refine and reshape their internal images, integrating the new with the known, and asking internal

*What  
good  
readers  
do*

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questions of the text such as, "What's going on here?" "Why did \_\_\_\_\_ happen?" "What will \_\_\_\_\_ do next?"

Good writers engage readers intentionally in just such ways. One of the pleasures of reading is that readers get to participate in the creation of the message. Good writers tell you just enough to keep you working with them, but not so much that you have nothing to do. They want their story to belong to you when you finish reading it. It is their gift.

You have encountered several passages designed to help you become aware of the complexities involved in reading and some of the strategies proficient readers use to construct meaning from print. These strategies are:

Predicting (before reading)

Cue sampling

Graphophonic

Syntactic

Semantic

Predicting (during reading)

Monitoring/confirming/disconfirming

Correcting

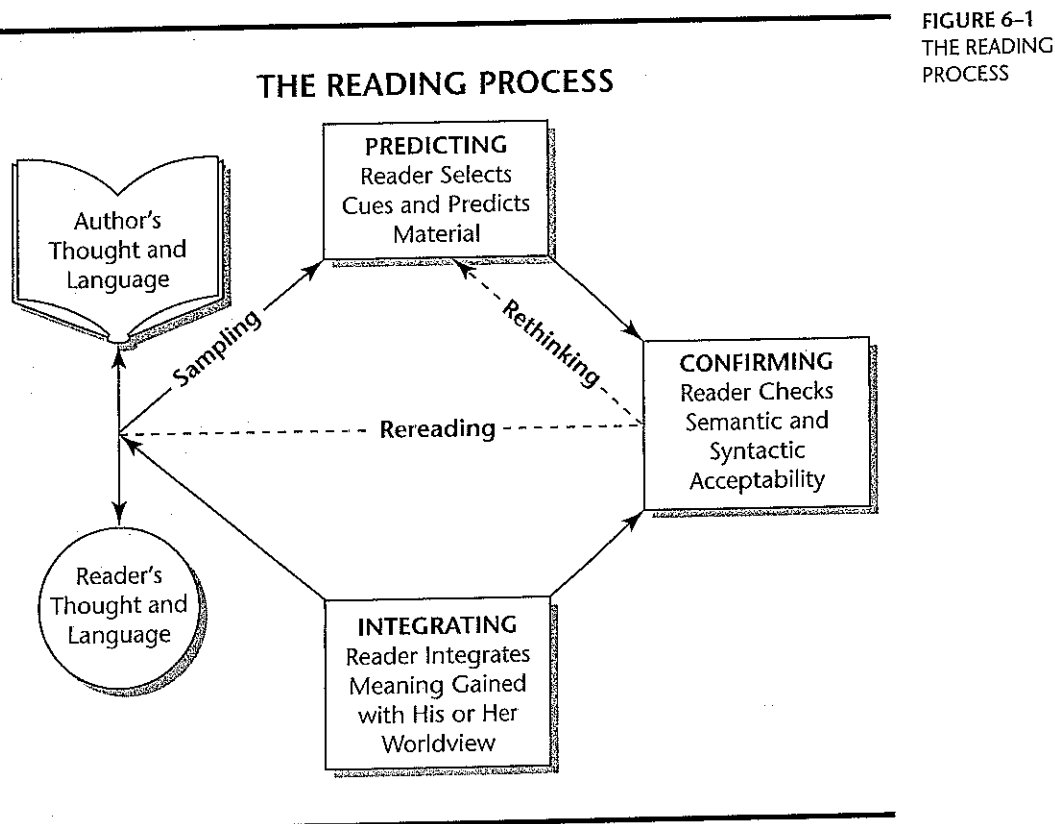
Integrating

Through your own attempts at reading these passages, you have examined several aspects of the reading process. What have you found?

Good readers *predict* what a selection is likely to be about. They use prior knowledge and text features including pictures when they are available. They also predict what is likely to come next as they are reading. They *sample* and interpret visual cues in three areas: graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic. Good readers also *monitor* what they read to determine if it sounds like language and if it makes sense. If it does, they keep on reading; if it doesn't, they try to *correct* it. Good readers *integrate* the new with what they already know. They employ prior knowledge or particular schemata to help them perceive, predict, and construct meaning as they read. Good teachers show them how to do these things.

Of course, as you probably concluded in the exercises above, these processes are much more effective if readers are reading something they want to know about and that they have chosen themselves. When readers read something because they want to or when they find it interesting, they are much more likely to understand and remember what they have read. Think about your own reading. How difficult is it to read something you don't want to read, you don't like, or you don't understand very well?

A more precise, operational definition of reading is that reading is a process involving language, thinking, and prior knowledge of the reader, transacting with the language, thinking, and background knowledge of the writer to construct meaning (see Figure 6-1). The reader transacts with the writer through the text, and a new text is constructed in the mind of each reader. This new text is not exactly what the author



or authors had in mind, partly because writers leave out information they think readers can infer and partly because each reader is a unique person, with different experiences and understandings to use in making sense of the language of a text.

Readers comprehend through the filter of their own life experiences and their own knowledge of the language. They integrate the new with what they already know. When readers write, they do similar processing. The text provides enough cues so readers can predict, confirm, and integrate. But, writers don't repeat old or obvious information they think readers can supply. They also leave out some information deliberately so readers can experience a sense of surprise. One of the worst things a critic can say about a book is that its plot is too predictable, except for beginning reading, of course.

Like oral language, written language is complex. Readers require great amounts of exposure to and experiences with books so they can internalize the schemata or mental processes necessary for constructing meaning from print. They use their internalized schemata as they read, and that is how readers' abilities become more and more sophisticated. Proficient readers sample, predict, confirm or self-correct, and think about what they are reading.

As we have said, proficient readers make use of three sets of cue systems *simultaneously* and in rather complex ways as they try to construct meaning from print. These cue systems, or sources of information that a reader uses are:

- *Meaning or semantics*—how words, phrases, sentences, and a whole text conveys meaning. Meaning comes from the learner's life experiences. Meaning is represented in memory and in language. Reading itself occurs in the mind of the reader. What is important is what readers do internally as they attempt to make sense of what they are seeing. Some learners, by the time you get them in your classroom, may have decided that reading doesn't make sense and that is a problem.
- *Structural or the grammatical system*—how word order and parts of words affect the message. Structure refers to what learners know about oral language—how oral language is organized. As you know, words are not strung together randomly. Rather, they are embedded in rules that allow us to know, for example, who did what to whom: Billy hit the ball. Rothgar read the note.
- *Visual or graphophonic system*—the marks on the page we can actually see, representing the sounds in English, the spelling system, elements of intonation, elements of punctuation such as capital letters and end marks, and elements of presentation such as paragraphing. Visual clues include awareness of the relationships between sound segments in oral language and the graphic symbols that spell them. In addition to letter-sound knowledge, the visual clues readers need also include punctuation, elements of notation such as capitalization, italics, paragraphing, and even picture clue support.

We have experimented with and discovered how these work in our own reading. Now examine children's reading to further deepen your understanding. Each example is from a child who is considered to be a struggling reader by his or her classroom teacher. Take a look at how second grader Sandra read the following excerpt from *Clifford's Birthday Party* by Bridwell. The marks tell us how the child read the text.

that      had given

We all laughed when we saw the gift from Jenny and her dog Flip

Compare Sandra's reading with how Tabitha, another second grader in a different classroom, read the same line.

loafed      <sup>ⓐ</sup>was      present      Fuh-lip

We all laughed when we saw the gift from Jenny and her dog Flip.

One child understands the story much better than the other. Can you tell which is which? Is "number of errors" the key? Actually, both readers made three errors. Tabitha self-corrected *was* for *saw*.

In the following selection, second grader Justin substitutes words but maintains an acceptable structure or grammar. However, even so, he loses meaning.



tripcate  
tricate way beautiful powder

They brought Clifford a gift certificate from the Bōw Wow Beauty Parlor.

Ashley, another child in a different second grade in Justin's school, reads the same lines as:

bought karfrēcate Woo  
They brought Clifford a gift certificate from the Bōw Wow Beauty Parlor

What we suspect about Ashley as a reader from looking at this one line compared to Justin's reading of the same text is that Ashley is better at connecting meaning across the story. She is not just sounding out words, but is also using meaning to help her substitute and self-correct.

In this excerpt from *Leo the Late Bloomer* by Kraus, the reader, a first grader named Max, tries to sound out the words he doesn't recognize without reference to meaning or grammar.

sings booming  
Every day Leo's father watched him for signs of blooming  
sings booming  
And every night Leo's father watched him for signs of blooming

However, here is an example of Rachael, who sounds out a difficult or unfamiliar word while thinking about what makes sense.

would try  
Every day Leo's father watched him for signs of blooming  
watching watch for  
And every night Leo's father watched him for signs of blooming

What does Rachael do as a proficient reader that Max does not do? Proficient readers sample, predict, confirm or self-correct, and think about what they are reading. Teachers who use good materials and show readers how to simultaneously use the three language-cueing systems must also know what to do to help students develop their own complex strategies for processing connected discourse. It is not enough to provide learners with just one strategy—for example, "sound it out." It is not enough to merely have on hand a wealth of good children's books. Direct teaching is also essential for helping early or poor readers do what proficient readers do. The students in the above examples needed something else in addition to good materials; they needed instruction, practice, explanations, demonstrations, suggestions, encouragement, questioning, self-correction strategies, modeling, and they needed these things sooner rather than later. In Chapter Seven we explore ways to assess and evaluate reading and how to use that information to plan appropriate reading instruction.

## SUMMARY

Reading and learning to read are active processes just as learning to swim, ski, play tennis, and drive a car are active processes. They are learned in the doing. They are not learned because we study about them. They are learned because learners want to learn; they want to join with other readers and writers; they want to do things with written language.

Written language provides strings of letters separated by spaces and little marks. Sometimes the text also provides pictures. Readers bring to the text what they know about sound-letter patterns, how grammar supports meaning, what the words in the text mean, and how they relate across the text. Readers also bring to the process everything they already know about the subject—as they attempt to construct a meaning and answer the question, What is going on here? Reading takes place in the mind of the reader. The meaning the reader constructs is different from the meaning the author had in his or her mind when he or she wrote the text. That is the way it is. All published authors understand this.

Proficient reading requires that the reader possess a complex network of strategies for processing text. This network of strategies involves the language, background, and thinking of the reader transacting with the language, background, and thinking of the writer (Rosenblatt, 1976). Good readers use several strategies including predicting, cue sampling, and self-correcting to make print meaningful. We learn to read by reading because that is the only way our brains can construct the intricate network of processes it takes to be literate.

In this chapter we've looked at what reading is and what it does. We've discussed why people read and the need humans have for reading. We have introduced the reading process. In the next chapter, we will describe how to use your knowledge of the reading process to teach it, or help children learn it. We will explore teaching reading, assessing reading, and how to use evaluation for planning instruction.

## THEORY-TO-PRACTICE CONNECTIONS

### *Reading Process Theory*

1. Reading is a strategic, socio-psycholinguistic process—it is constructive and generative, as is all language.
2. All language processes, reading, writing, speaking, and listening, support each other.
3. Reading is a tool for learning and for enjoyment.
4. Readers must want to read and expect to be able to do so.

### *Examples of Classroom Practice*

1. Previewing texts, monitoring comprehension.
2. Read aloud time and talking about texts.
3. Readers need time to really read and they need access to quality literature.
4. Purposeful reading: low-risk environments, guidance and support, and predictable books.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

### *A. Holistic View—Reading as Communication*

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### B. Traditional, Skills View—Reading as Word Getting

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## EXTENDING YOUR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss how what we know about the reading process relates to language learning theory. How is what proficient readers do similar to what all active learners do?
2. Find a copy of Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*. Read the story and describe who or what the tree represents. Discuss with classmates who have also read the story. You should find that each of you has a slightly different interpretation of this text. Who is right? What does that indicate about reading? (You might also use *Love You Forever*, by Munsch.)
3. For several days, keep a list of some of your own errors or miscues as you read. On a given class day, have a "Miscues We Have Known and Loved" celebration. Each student can bring one of his or her own particularly interesting miscues to share. For example, as I was reading Stephen King's book *On Writing*, I encountered the follow passage about his reading the then-popular book *Valley of the Dolls*. Here is what he wrote and how I misread it:

I was a cook's boy at a western Maine resort that summer, gobbling it up as eagerly as everyone else who bought it I suppose, but I can't remember much of what it was about. On the whole, I think I prefer the weekly codswallop served up by *The National Enquirer* where I can get recipes and cheesecake photographs as well as scandal. (190)

I had to reread the last sentence three times before I could "see" the word *and* in between "recipes and cheesecake" . . . I was reading it as *for*. Why could I "hear" that there was a problem, but could not "see" what the problem was? What are some of the reasons you think I might have read "recipes *for* cheesecake" instead of "recipes *and* cheesecake"? Analyze and discuss your own miscues in this way.

4. If you are working in an elementary classroom listen to several children read. Decide what phase of reading development each child is in. What is the range of levels and abilities that exist in the class? How is the teacher coping with such a range? Share your findings.

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